



Sex-Based Rights.
Evidence-Based Policy.

Beneath the surface

How gender identity is reshaping Europe



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Beneath the surface

How gender identity is reshaping Europe



What lies beneath the surface



In both the European Union and the Council of Europe, policies are being rewritten in ways that obscure sex as a legal and material reality.

For well over a decade, we've watched fundamental principles – clarity in law, the meaning of *woman*, the basis for sex-based rights – erode under the weight of ideological capture. The shift from sex to gender identity is not just a matter of language. It is a structural transformation, reshaping how institutions across Europe understand rights, build policy and allocate resources and power.

We have written this report because too many in politics, civil society and the public sphere are navigating this shift in silence – unsure what has changed, how it has happened or what it means for democratic accountability.

In both the European Union and the Council of Europe, policies are being rewritten in ways that obscure sex as a legal and material reality. These shifts often circumvent formal legislation, instead advancing through guidelines, recommendations, strategies, roadmaps and other soft law instruments that reshape institutional norms without public debate. This has enabled a steady and largely unexamined expansion of gender identity frameworks into a wide array of sectors, from employment and education to health care and social services, anti-discrimination, sports, civil society funding and the collection of data and statistics, as well as the training of judicial, law enforcement, administrative and equality bodies. Across these areas, institutional practices increasingly reflect a model of gender identity as innate and self-defined. This is visible in the Europe-wide promotion of legal self-ID, the drive for conversion therapy bans on gender identity and gender expression, and efforts to regulate speech that conflate disagreement, including feminist critique, with hate – eroding the fundamental principles of democracy and infringing on freedom of expression.

The consequences are political, institutional and cultural, undermining the rights and protections of women and girls, lesbians and gay men, and children and adolescents, and ultimately harming society at large.

As policy practitioners, we have worked in and around the institutions now undergoing this transformation. We know how language shifts become legal shifts, and how silence becomes complicity. This report is our contribution to breaking that silence and to uncovering what is happening behind closed doors.

Beneath the surface is a map of actors, changes and consequences that too often remain unnoticed and go unchallenged. We hope it equips you to examine more carefully, speak more clearly, advocate more confidently, and act with a deeper understanding of what is really at stake. It is an invitation to build this work with us: to open up the debate, transcend partisan divides and ground our approach in democratic values and universal human rights.

Faika El-Nagashi

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Introducing Athena Forum

A European initiative for sex-based rights, democratic values and political courage

Athena Forum was founded in response to a growing political, institutional and societal shift across Europe: the erosion of sex-based rights through ideological capture, the suppression of dissent and debate and the striking absence of civil society organisations willing to confront this change.

We are a European think tank and strategic hub working to safeguard and advance sex-based rights across law, policy and civil society and to confront their misrepresentation in public discourse. We bring together legal, medical and policy experts, alongside feminists, academics, journalists and grassroots advocates combining skills and expertise to ensure these rights remain visible, coherent and politically protected, while strengthening democratic accountability across European institutions.

What we do

We work across advocacy, legal and policy analysis, public and media engagement, and institutional monitoring, building a resourceful and impactful non-partisan platform across Europe.



- **We track legal and policy changes**

in equality, education, health, justice and other key sectors, with a focus on where sex-based rights are being reframed, contested or undermined.

- **We engage politically and publicly**

contributing to national and European-level debates.

- **We offer cross-border and regional coordination**

supporting collaboration and amplifying the perspectives of local and national grassroots groups and initiatives.

- **We engage with European institutions**

monitoring developments and advocating for clarity, accountability and respect for sex-based rights in policy and decision-making.

- **We build capacity and a strong network**

delivering training, mentorship and knowledge-sharing to contribute to sustainable and resilient organising and impactful strategy.

Athena Forum is built for collaboration. Together we can grow this work.

Foreword

Sex Matters is proud to have supported the foundation of Athena Forum, a much-needed European initiative to fight for sex-based rights and democratic values, and to re-ignite political courage.

This report, authored by Faika El-Nagashi and Anna Zobnina, is one of Athena Forum's first major undertakings – a sharply focused and meticulously researched account of how gender identity ideology has captured European institutions.

The report explains how activists have exploited the linguistic slippage between sex and *gender* to pull the foundation of material reality out from under the powerful institutions of Brussels and Strasbourg. The catalogue of harms is all too familiar to sex-realist campaigners in the UK: democratic accountability undermined; women's rights discounted; free speech curtailed; children and adolescents harmed; the rights of gays and lesbians eroded; sporting fairness for women abandoned; and statistics distorted.

But the spirit of defiance is familiar to us too, as is the resolve to win back what has been lost.

It is timely and significant that Faika El-Nagashi chose to respond to these developments by founding Athena Forum. She is uniquely positioned to lead this work: a long-time advocate for women's rights, a former Green party politician, and someone who was actively involved in the influential networks IGLYO, ILGA-Europe, and EL*C. In recent years, her insistence on the reality of sex, and that men and women are different groups, has led to exclusion from some of the very organisations she helped build. For those determined to pretend otherwise, cancelling Faika may prove to have been a serious strategic error.

I hope that Athena Forum will embody the same fine characteristics as its namesake and its founder: intelligence, courage and strategic thinking. For this to happen, it needs to gather support and build momentum. This report, which will spark conversations and create connections, is an excellent first step. Please share it, support it and speak up about the issues it so clearly reveals. Above all, don't doubt that a small group of hardworking, thoughtful and committed citizens can win back our institutions. There is too much at stake to give up.

“ But the spirit of defiance is familiar to us too, as is the resolve to win back what has been lost. ”



Maya Forstater
Chief Executive Officer
Sex Matters

A European initiative for sex-based rights, democratic values and political courage.

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Losing the language of sex

The European Union (EU) was not only founded as an economic alliance but also as a political project built on fundamental rights. Among its earliest and most clearly defined legal principles is [equality](#) between women and men, first enshrined in the EU treaties in 1957 to secure equal pay between the sexes. Over time, this principle expanded to cover working conditions, social security, access to goods and services, maternity protection and work-life balance.

Sex-based equality is not merely a declared value in the EU legal framework, it is a binding obligation. Article 8 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) commits the EU to eliminate inequalities and promote equality between women and men across all its activities. Alongside this sits the broader commitment to combat discrimination on several grounds, including sex (Article 10 TFEU).

The meaning of women and men in EU law was, at the time of drafting, unambiguous: women are adult human females, men are adult human males. In some provisions, this is clarified explicitly – for instance, the requirement that “each Member State shall ensure the principle of equal pay for male and female workers for equal work” ([Article 157 TFEU](#)).

To accelerate implementation, the EU adopted the approach of [mainstreaming equal opportunities for women](#) and men in the mid-1990s. This evolved into *gender mainstreaming*, promoted by the 1995 [UN Beijing Platform for Action](#), a global roadmap for advancing women’s rights, shaped by thousands of feminist activists and state representatives, including the EU as an institutional actor. At the time, *gender* referred to the social system of unequal power relations between the sexes – rooted in outdated stereotypes about how women and men are expected to behave – not an innate identity apart from the reality of biology.

Unbeknownst to most participants in Beijing, a parallel development was unfolding elsewhere. In the early-to-mid 1990s, a group of US-based transactivists released the [International Bill of Gender Rights](#), proposing a conceptual shift: replacing biological sex with an internal sense of *gender identity* as the basis of legal and social recognition. Over the following decades, this interpretation gained institutional traction.

Within EU and Council of Europe (CoE) institutions, the term *gender* began to displace sex in law and policy. While this shift was often driven by well-meaning actors aiming to advance inclusion, it has led to serious consequences for the legal clarity and integrity of sex-based protections. *Gender identity* is now treated as a core legal category, while the original concept of sex equality – central to EU law – has been diluted or redefined.

As a result, we are now witnessing the near-erasure of the sex-based framework in EU policymaking. Equality between women and men has been reframed as *gender* equality, a term open to wide and conflicting interpretations. Legal protections and data collection once designed to address sex-based inequalities are increasingly formulated around *gender identity*. Same-sex relations are redefined as [same-gender](#); violence against women becomes gender-based violence, in which the sex of victim and perpetrator is obscured. Gender mainstreaming has shifted from promoting equality between women and men to advancing *gender identity and expression*; concepts that are not only vague, but ultimately incompatible with the meaning and function of sex-based protections. If *woman* can mean anything, it ultimately means nothing. As definitions blur, so too do the mechanisms designed to protect women. Services meant for women and girls, such as rape crisis centres or sports competitions, face new pressures to prioritise feelings over biological reality.

This shift reflects a collision between two competing uses of the term *gender*: one rooted in feminist analysis of sex-based social roles, and the other promoted by the trans movement as an innate and self-defined identity. Over time, it was the latter interpretation that gained dominance in EU and CoE frameworks, reshaping policies and institutional language accordingly.

Sex, the first protected ground listed in the [EU Charter of Fundamental Rights](#), is now conspicuously absent from major EU strategies and public communication. Across institutions, efforts are made to avoid even using the term, on paper or in speech. As these texts are translated into the EU’s 24 official languages, their meanings become even more unstable, as it often remains unclear what *gender* is meant to signify: biological sex, socially constructed roles and stereotypes, power relations between the sexes or concepts tied to gender identity.

The result is a legal and policy environment where fundamental sex-based rights have become increasingly difficult to name, defend or enforce, shifting the foundation of human rights from objective conditions to subjective identities.



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For over fifteen years, a serious ideological shift has taken root across European institutions.

The gender identity lobby in Europe

For over fifteen years, a serious ideological shift has taken root across European institutions, reflected in changing language, concepts, policies and institutional orientation.

A number of later highly influential umbrella organisations had formed by the mid-2010s. TGEU (Transgender Europe) was registered in 2007, and OII Europe (Organisation Intersex International Europe) in 2015. ILGA (International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association) was founded in 1978 as a global network; its regional branch, ILGA-Europe, was established in 1996. By the early 2010s, ILGA-Europe had adopted a [trans-rights focus](#) into its core activities, especially through its Rainbow Map advocacy tool, strategic litigation, reports and national-level advocacy. Along with IGLYO (International LGBTQI Youth and Student Organisation, founded in 1984) and the younger EL*G (EuroCentralAsian Lesbian* Community), established in 2017 and open to anyone who identifies as lesbian (which for them includes “all LBTI women and non-binary persons that identify or are perceived as lesbians, bisexual or queer women”), they form the Big Five of European LGBTIQ and transactivist civil society organisations.

These organisations receive [funding](#) from EU programmes, human rights foundations and other philanthropic grantmakers amounting to tens of millions of euros over the last decade. Their institutional and financial ties give them substantial influence in framing norms and steering policy priorities.

These funds – often under the banner of human rights, democracy, equality and inclusion – sustain strategic litigation and advocacy efforts, lobbying campaigns and extensive training activities across European institutions, civil society and the media. Today, these Big Five are central to shaping the European policy ecosystem around gender identity.

In addition to these groups, many broader human rights organisations – working in fields like women’s rights, sexual and reproductive health, asylum, youth advocacy, anti-discrimination and international development – have adopted both a transactivist framework and gender identity as core components of their work. Whether through funding conditionalities, policy alignment or ideological convergence, gender identity is now treated as a given within large segments of the European human rights civil society sector.

At the same time, there are virtually no institutional voices advocating for sex-based women’s rights, same-sex orientation as a distinct legal category grounded in biological sex or a reality-based human rights framework over one built on self-declared identity. This asymmetry leaves critical gaps in representation and accountability, silencing those who disagree with the dominant institutional consensus.

Whether through funding conditionalities, policy alignment or ideological convergence, gender identity is now treated as a given within large segments of the European human rights civil society sector.



The soft-law framework: Yogyakarta



Drafted in November 2006 in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, and formally launched at a United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council session in March 2007, the [Yogyakarta Principles](#) were developed by 29 human-rights advocates, including academics, legal scholars and former UN officials, specifically to apply existing international law to sexual orientation and gender identity. They defined gender identity as “a deeply felt internal and individual experience of gender”, embedding this language into recommended state obligations, media behaviour and NGO action. In November 2017, the Yogyakarta Principles plus 10 (YP+10), a revision including gender expression and sex characteristics, were released.

A noteworthy addition is Principle 31 of the YP+10, which calls on states to end the registration of sex in all legal documents, including birth certificates and passports. This demand to abolish sex as a legal category stands in direct contradiction to EU and international human rights frameworks, which rely on sex-based classifications to define and enforce protections.

Although non-binding, the Yogyakarta Principles rapidly gained official traction after their 2007 release. In 2009, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights referenced them in his [Issue Paper: Human Rights and Gender Identity](#), urging Council of Europe member states to align their domestic legislation with the principles’ framework. This marked the first formal endorsement by a European human rights body and laid the groundwork for their uptake in soft-law instruments.

In 2015, Michael O’Flaherty, the lead drafter and rapporteur of the Yogyakarta Principles was appointed Director of the EU Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA), creating a direct institutional link between the principles and the EU’s human rights architecture. Under his leadership, the FRA embedded the Yogyakarta framework into its analytical and thematic reports and policy recommendations, giving momentum, legitimacy and institutional weight to the concept of gender identity in EU policymaking.

By 2019, the European Parliament was explicitly citing both the original Yogyakarta Principles and the YP+10 update in official resolutions, notably in its adoption of a resolution on the rights of intersex people (2018/2878(RSP)), which referenced the principles as authoritative texts. This firmly embedded the Yogyakarta Principles and YP+10 framework into European soft law, integrating its approach into the language of non-binding but symbolically powerful policy documents.

Although non-binding, the Yogyakarta Principles rapidly gained official traction after their 2007 release.

From principle to policy

In the late 2000s, transactivist organisations began using the Council of Europe (CoE) as an entry point to embed gender identity into international law and policy. In 2008, the CoE Commissioner for Human Rights, Thomas Hammarberg, convened an [expert meeting](#) with transactivist organisations, including ILGA-Europe and Press for Change UK. Their demands – focused on legal recognition of self-ID, access to services and institutional reform – shaped the commissioner’s issue paper, [Human Rights and Gender Identity](#) (2009), which articulated these demands as priorities within an international human rights framework.

In 2010, the CoE’s Committee of Ministers issued [Recommendation CM/Rec\(2010\)5](#) on measures to combat discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity, the first European institutional instrument to explicitly mention gender identity as a ground for protection from discrimination. While the recommendation doesn’t explicitly define the term, its appendix refers to gender reassignment, urging member states to remove medical requirements for legal sex recognition; facilitate faster and simpler administrative changes to someone’s “name and gender” in all documents; and revise national law, healthcare systems and data collection practices.

The recommendation cited an emerging international development: the 2008 [joint statement](#) at the United Nations General Assembly by 66 states and an earlier 2006 [intervention](#) by Norway at the UN Commission on Human Rights on behalf of 54 states, both calling for protection on the basis of gender identity.

The recommendation was drafted by the Committee of Experts on Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (DH-LGBT), with ILGA-Europe and Transgender Europe (TGEU) formally participating as [observers](#), embedding them in a high-level European standard-setting process and ensuring the systematic inclusion of transactivist terms and concepts.

In 2011, these advocacy efforts secured inclusion in binding law. The CoE Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence ([Istanbul Convention](#)) included gender identity in its non-discrimination scope (alongside sex and gender). ILGA-Europe was actively [involved](#) in the drafting process, pushing for this inclusion. That same year, the EU adopted the [Qualification Directive](#) (2011/95/EU), which harmonises standards for granting international protection. It recognises gender identity as a potential ground for persecution, requiring member states to consider it in asylum procedures.

Together, these measures created a new institutional framework for interpreting gender identity as a rights category, beyond mere anti-discrimination rhetoric. They laid the groundwork for its integration across national laws, administrative practices and international soft law, often with minimal legislative oversight, entrenching transactivist definitions within official policy structures.



The Istanbul Convention (2011) marked the first binding international treaty in Europe to include gender identity in its non-discrimination scope, alongside sex and gender.

Across European institutions, a constellation of influential agencies, expert bodies and advisory groups has propelled gender identity into the mainstream of public governance.

Institutional expansion: A system-wide doctrine

Across European institutions, a constellation of influential agencies, expert bodies and advisory groups has propelled gender identity into the mainstream of public governance.

At the EU level, the European Parliament's [Intergroup](#) on LGBTIQ+ Rights (founded in 1997), an informal but highly influential and active network of around 150 Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), has been instrumental in drafting resolutions, organising high-profile debates – such as the conference “(Trans)Gender Equality?” in 2010 in the European Parliament – and channelling transactivist demands into EU policymaking.

Among them, the European Parliamentary Forum for Sexual and Reproductive Rights ([EPF](#)), a Brussels-based lobby group, works to build and coordinate a cross-party network of over 300 parliamentarians from 40 European countries. While originally focused on reproductive rights, the EPF has gradually expanded its agenda to include gender identity, promoting related policies across Europe.

Institutional backing is reinforced by EU agencies, most notably the Fundamental Rights Agency ([FRA](#)) and the European Institute for Gender Equality ([EIGE](#)). They are two among more than 30 decentralised bodies whose primary role is to advise the European Commission on policy, not to interpret law expansively or introduce legal concepts through policy recommendations.

The FRA's remit is primarily non-discrimination under the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. It conducts research, publishes position papers and offers policy guidance to EU institutions and member states, regularly referencing gender identity and gender expression as core components of human rights frameworks. In 2009, the FRA published its first major report explicitly including gender identity (and referencing cross-dressing men) as a protected ground, [Homophobia and Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in the EU Member States \(Part II: The Social Situation\)](#), marking a significant step in the institutionalisation of gender identity within EU expert analysis. Additionally, the CoE published its own comprehensive report in 2011, [Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in Europe](#), which drew on FRA data for EU member states and expanded the analysis to include the broader CoE region.

[Eurobarometer](#), a survey initiative under the Directorate-General for Communication, plays a significant role in shaping perception. By adding trans categories into its attitudinal surveys on discrimination and on acceptance of gay- and lesbian-related issues, it has helped amplify transactivist framings and priorities. Working closely with the FRA, it contributes to a mutually reinforcing data-policy feedback loop.



The European Parliament's LGBTIQ+ Intergroup has been instrumental in channelling transactivist demands into EU policymaking.

Institutional expansion: A system-wide doctrine (Continued)



The EIGE was set up in 2006 and became operational in 2010. It was [established](#) to promote gender equality and combat discrimination based on sex through independent research, data and policy tools. Today, its materials routinely integrate gender identity into EU-level definitions of gender equality and mainstreaming. Drawing from the Yogyakarta Principles and EU/CoE language, the EIGE [defines](#) gender identity as “each person’s deeply felt internal and individual experience of gender”, including bodily perception and expression. By embedding gender identity into its terminology and frameworks, the EIGE has increasingly linked sex categories to self-declared identity rather than biological reality, undermining sex-based analysis of inequality and distorting efforts to monitor and promote gender equality.

At the same time, Eurostat, the EU’s statistical office, finds itself increasingly under pressure to abandon clear [binary sex classifications](#) to accommodate self-declared gender identities, despite the absence of legal harmonisation across member states.

In 2014, the European Parliament adopted the [Roadmap against homophobia and discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity](#). Central to the resolution was a call for the Commission, member states and relevant EU agencies to jointly develop a comprehensive multi-year policy (a roadmap, strategy or action plan) to protect the fundamental rights of LGBTI people. This culminated six years later in the launch of the [EU LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020–2025](#). The resolution also extended its scope beyond the EU’s borders: it urged the Commission, the European External Action Service (EEAS) and member states to systematically apply the EU’s external human rights guidelines in third countries in matters related to gender identity.

Meanwhile, several specialised bodies and working groups within the CoE have actively promoted gender identity concepts, steadily transforming them into normative categories of rights and protection. The Steering Committee for Human Rights ([CDDH](#)),

the CoE’s principal intergovernmental expert body, drafted [Recommendation CM/Rec\(2010\)5](#), the first European instrument to introduce gender identity as a protected category, despite the lack of a clear or widely accepted definition. Since then, this terminology has gained institutional traction. In 2023, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance ([ECRI](#)), a CoE monitoring body, issued [General Policy Recommendation No. 17](#) on combating intolerance and discrimination against LGBTI people. It explicitly promotes the legal recognition of self-ID, bans on conversion practices related to gender identity and gender expression and the integration of this ideological framework into national education systems.

The CoE’s [Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, and Sex Characteristics \(SOGIESC\) Unit](#) (established in 2014 as the SOGI – sexual orientation and gender identity – unit) further advances this agenda by providing training for judges, prosecutors, law enforcement and equality bodies across member states. By embedding gender identity norms into professional standards, the unit has helped entrench previously contested ideas across legal, administrative, educational and law enforcement systems.

Gradually, the EU and CoE have assembled a dense network of agencies, expert bodies and institutional actors whose non-binding outputs exert outsized influence on both European and national policymaking. Through communications, recommendations, toolkits and data collection, they operate as a parallel layer of governance. While lacking the force of law, these instruments guide funding and training priorities, shape public messaging and steer institutional norms across member states.



Glossary to governance: The politics of language

Terms like **SOGI**, **SOGIESC**, **SOGICE**, **LGBTIQ+** (and the variations thereof), **queer**, **non-binary**, **gender identity**, **gender expression** and **self-identification** have shifted from activist slogans into bureaucratic language. Once embedded in official documents, these terms make policymaking opaque, inaccessible and difficult to challenge. Consistency when writing about this issue is unattainable, since the initialisms and terms used across the many documents, policies and treaties vary so greatly.

They are also politically charged because of the transactivist intentions and interpretations they carry: **sex characteristics** is used to refer to intersex people; **gender expression** to include non-binary and non-transitioned but trans-identified individuals; and **gender identity** as shorthand for trans-identified people more broadly.

Because the concepts themselves lack clear definitions and are not grounded in logic or evidence, they become impossible to scrutinise. The absence of any meaningful impact assessment on other affected groups, such as women or children, undermines good governance and renders the harms invisible. Any attempt to question them is dismissed as prejudice rather than met with reasoned debate or substantive counterargument. Institutions treat them as established facts, making them nearly unavoidable in political discussions. This dynamic empowers those fluent in the new vocabulary while sidelining others, pushing the public to either adopt the jargon and its implications or risk being dismissed as ignorant, bigoted or hateful.

Drivers of Europe's erasure of sex as a political and legal category

The erasure of sex as a legal and political category in Europe has been a complex process, driven by the incremental substitution of sex with gender identity and the gradual conflation of gender identity with sexual orientation in policy texts. At the end of this legal engineering, sex – along with sex-disaggregated data and sex-based protections – is set to lose both its relevance and its legitimacy in the eyes of the law, thus fulfilling a central demand of the Yogyakarta Principles.

As with any policy reform, this process has depended on concrete institutional mechanisms and actors. Yet, unlike other policy changes, the disappearance of sex has been accompanied by unprecedented consequences for those who have noticed and objected. Long-standing feminist campaigners and lesbian and gay rights activists have faced reprisals, ostracism and the withdrawal of funds and institutional support.



Timeline



Early UN Recognition

2006

The [Yogyakarta Principles](#) are drafted and formally launched at the UN Human Rights Council in 2007, introducing gender identity into international soft-law frameworks.

2006

Norway, in a [joint statement](#) on behalf of 54 UN states, cites gender identity at the 3rd Session of the UN Human Rights Council, the first mention in a UN context.

2008

A [joint statement](#) by 66 states at the UN General Assembly condemns human-rights violations based on sexual orientation and gender identity, thereby merging two unrelated concepts.

Council of Europe



2009

CoE Commissioner for Human Rights publishes the Issue Paper [Human Rights and Gender Identity](#), urging member states to enshrine the Yogyakarta Principles in domestic law.

2010

The Committee of Ministers of the CoE adopts the Recommendation on measures to combat discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity ([CM/Rec\(2010\)5](#)), its first intergovernmental instrument to explicitly recognise gender identity as a protected characteristic under anti-discrimination policy.

2011

The CoE adopts the [Istanbul Convention](#), the first binding international treaty to combat violence against women and domestic violence. It includes gender identity in its non-discrimination scope, marking a significant shift in legal framing.

2011

CoE Commissioner for Human Rights publishes [Discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity in Europe](#), building on FRA data to assess CoE member states' status quo and issuing comprehensive recommendations to member states.

2014

CoE's [SOGIESC Unit](#) is established, following the mandate of [CM/Rec\(2010\)5](#) on combating discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity. Its primary role is to provide training and guidance for public officials, law enforcement and legal professionals across Europe, embedding gender identity related concepts into administrative practice and professional standards.

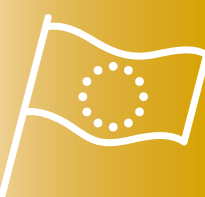
2015

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) adopts [Resolution 2048](#) on "Discrimination against transgender people in Europe" urging member states to adopt legal recognition based on self-ID. The assembly "welcomes ... the emergence of a right to gender identity, first enshrined in the legislation of Malta, which gives every individual the right to recognition of their gender identity and the right to be treated and identified according to this identity."

2024

CoE Commissioner for Human Rights releases an updated Issue Paper, [Human Rights and Gender Identity and Expression](#), reaffirming the 2009 framework and expanding it further. The report promotes legal self-ID (including for minors and "a third gender category"), access to single-sex spaces based on self-ID, and inclusion of trans identified men in female sports categories.

European Union



2011

The EU adopts the [Recast Qualification Directive](#) (2011/95/EU), which harmonises standards for granting international protection across member states and recognises gender identity as a potential ground for persecution. It requires member states to consider such claims in asylum procedures, embedding the concept into binding EU law and expanding protection obligations under the Common European Asylum System.

2012

The EU adopts the [Victims' Rights Directive](#) (2012/29/EU), establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime. The directive requires individual assessments to identify specific protection needs and explicitly calls for measures sensitive to victims' characteristics, including gender, gender identity and gender expression, embedding these concepts into EU-wide victim support frameworks.

2014

European Parliament passes the [Roadmap against homophobia and discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity](#). For the first time, it explicitly names gender identity as a ground for EU-level anti-discrimination action, calling on the Commission, member states and EU agencies such as FRA and EIGE to address it in policymaking and institutional practice, and to develop a comprehensive strategy for mainstreaming.

2018

European Parliament resolution on the [Situation of fundamental rights in the EU in 2016](#) (adopted in 2018) calls on member states to ban "LGBTI conversion therapies" and urges governments to ensure access to legal self-ID.

2019

European Parliament adopted the resolution [Experiencing backlash in women's rights and gender equality in the EU](#), which explicitly framed opposition to gender identity as part of a broader conservative pushback against gender equality.

2019

European Parliament adopts a resolution on [The rights of intersex people](#), referencing both Yogyakarta Principles and YP+10 and thus enshrining them within EU soft law.

2024

The EU adopts two directives setting binding standards for national equality bodies: [Directive \(EU\) 2024/1499](#) and [Directive \(EU\) 2024/1500](#). They establish minimum requirements for the independence, mandate and resourcing of equality bodies across member states and include provisions related to protection from discrimination arising from gender reassignment. Directive 2024/1500, which focuses on equality between women and men in employment and occupation, explicitly references gender identity, gender expression and – for the first time in binding EU law – sex characteristics.

Since the 2014 Roadmap resolution, the European Parliament has adopted a series of resolutions that steadily reinforce sexual orientation and gender identity as a joint framework across multiple policy domains, including on human rights, women's rights, conversion therapy bans, hate speech and legal recognition.

Member states are increasingly adopting legal self-ID laws, often under pressure from transactivist groups and in the mistaken belief that such measures are required by EU or human rights law.

Mainstreaming confusion: The LGBTIQ Equality Strategy

In November 2020, the European Commission launched the [LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020–2025](#), the EU's first comprehensive policy framework focused on lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex and so-called queer rights.

Led by the Commissioner for Equality, Helena Dalli, the strategy promised to build “a Union of Equality”, integrating LGBTIQ concerns across all areas of EU competence, from employment and education to justice, health and external relations.

Presented as a response to rising intolerance and inequality, the strategy sets out a wide-ranging agenda: implement legal recognition based on self-ID, ban conversion therapy focused on gender identity and gender expression, expand hate speech and hate crime laws, and

systematically embed gender identity related priorities into policy-making, funding instruments, institutional practices, monitoring, training and data collection.

Behind the language of inclusion and rights lies a significant shift: the institutionalisation of gender identity ideology across EU governance. Activist-defined terms are increasingly treated as standard categories in law, policy and public administration. The LGBTIQ Equality Strategy serves as a central tool to embed this framework across legal systems, social norms and institutional practice.

Activist-defined terms are increasingly treated as standard categories in law, policy and public administration.

Self-ID across Europe

Legal sex self-identification, once a contested activist demand, has become the de facto standard across much of Europe.

Though not mandated through binding legislation, the EU LGBTIQ Equality Strategy and accompanying recommendations [strongly endorse self-ID laws](#) and urge member states to adopt them.

Since 2014, a growing number of European states have adopted explicit self-ID frameworks, including Denmark, Malta, Ireland, Norway, Belgium, Portugal, Luxembourg, Iceland, Switzerland, Spain, Finland and Germany. In others, such as Sweden, Greece and Austria, administrative practice, legislative

reform or court rulings have made legal sex change readily obtainable, though in some cases still subject to judicial proceedings or formal approval. Several of these countries have also introduced a third option, registering one's sex as neither male nor female.

Some states, such as Spain, Switzerland and Germany, permit legal self-ID for minors – sometimes from the age of 12 with parental or guardian consent. In Germany, there is no minimum age at all if the declaration is made by a parent or legal guardian on the child's behalf. In other countries, access may be

conditional on residency requirements or administrative waiting periods. Germany also imposes fines for publicly disclosing an individual's legal sex change, part of one of the broadest self-ID laws in Europe.

Countries across Europe are increasingly adopting legal self-ID laws, often under pressure from transactivist groups and in the mistaken belief that such measures are required by EU or human rights law, frequently without public debate and at the expense of safeguarding children, sex-based rights and legal coherence.

Conversion therapy bans



Another flagship objective of the LGBTIQ Equality Strategy is the banning of so-called conversion therapies. The practice has a dark and targeted history, aimed specifically at lesbians and gay men. Framed as a medical, psychological or moral intervention, doctors, psychiatrists, military institutions and religious authorities subjected same-sex attracted people to brutal procedures: lobotomies, electroshock, drug-induced aversion, chemical castration, rape and forced organ removal. As homosexuality was declassified as a disorder in much of the West, these violent interventions dwindled, though certain conservative and religious groups continued to argue that sexual orientation could – and should – be changed, making it a key advocacy target for early LGB activists.

Today, however, conversion therapy has taken on a new meaning. Once used to describe coercive attempts to change sexual orientation, the term is now widely applied to any therapeutic, parental or educational approach that does not affirm a child's self-declared gender identity.

With this expansion, a radically different framework emerged: rather than preventing coercive treatment, bans now often require professionals to affirm a person's declared gender identity, especially in the case of children and adolescents. In many jurisdictions, bans focus primarily on minors. At the same time, mental health professionals continue to play a role in assessing and authorising individuals for legal or medical transition.

This places clinicians in a bind; under systemic pressure to affirm, they are stripped of the ability to exercise clinical judgment. The therapeutic process collapses into affirmation, with serious consequences for young people navigating complex emotional and developmental landscapes.

A growing body of [evidence](#) suggests that many trans-identified adolescents are gender-nonconforming youth, often same-sex attracted, who in earlier decades would likely have grown up to be lesbian or gay adults. What once amounted to attempts to “cure the gay” has, in some cases, become “transing the gay away”.

[Several studies](#) show that adolescents with gender dysphoria frequently experience psychiatric and neurodevelopmental comorbidities, such as ADHD, autism spectrum disorder, depression, anxiety and eating disorders. The pressure on therapists to affirm a youth's self-diagnosis without thorough exploration can overshadow these complex needs and exclude parents from supportive dialogue.

This shift has profound implications. By mandating affirmative approaches to self-declared gender identity, these bans:

- pressure all mental-health professionals into affirmation-only care.
- eliminate cautious, exploratory approaches like “watchful waiting”, in favour of automatic affirmation.
- obscure the need to assess and treat comorbidities or pursue clinical diagnoses independent of what the patient self-reports.
- narrow the training and guidance offered to professionals (including therapists, youth and social workers, and child welfare staff) by embedding affirmation-only models into professional standards and certification.
- specifically affect lesbian and gay adolescents, who may struggle with internalised homophobia or hostile family and peer environments, leaving their needs unexamined and misdirecting them toward transition.
- expose parents, teachers, educators and health professionals to potential criminal or administrative sanctions if they question immediate affirmation or seek a more comprehensive approach.
- prohibit any direct or indirect public funding for services or organisations perceived to contradict affirmation-based models, even when these offer neutral, exploratory or therapeutic support.



The therapeutic process collapses into affirmation, with serious consequences for young people navigating complex emotional and developmental landscapes.

Conversion therapy bans (Continued)

Despite this complexity, European resolutions refer to conversion practices based not only on sexual orientation, but deliberately also on gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics, even though public awareness still largely understands such practices as attempts to suppress homosexuality. This expanded framing has been driven by transactivist lobbying and has rarely been subjected to open, critical debate.

The first EU member state to introduce a comprehensive nationwide ban was Malta (2016), followed by Germany (2020), France (2022), Greece (2022), Spain (2023), Belgium (2023), Cyprus (2023) and Portugal (2024). Proposals for similar legislation have been brought forward in Poland, Ireland, Austria and the Netherlands.

Many of these laws share near-identical structures, as transactivists and lawmakers have copied the Maltese model across jurisdictions, embedding expansive definitions and penalties into national frameworks. Several national human rights structures – such as ombudsman institutions, equality bodies and human rights institutes – are supporting this process by issuing guidance and framing it as a human rights obligation for governments.

At the European level, the push for such laws has gained steady momentum. The European Parliament first called for a ban in a [2018 resolution](#) and has reiterated this demand in subsequent policy communications. In 2023, the CoE's Commissioner for Human Rights, Dunja Mijatović, published a [statement](#) pushing for legal bans on conversion practices throughout Europe.

In 2024, the European Parliament called on the Commission to explore the EU legal framework and the possible avenues that could be followed to counter and ban conversion practices at EU level and push member states to ban conversion practices on the grounds of sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics ([2023/2082\(INI\)](#)). In the same year, Commission President Ursula von der Leyen [tasked](#) the incoming Equality Commissioner, Hadja Lahbib, with implementing this objective, solidifying conversion therapy bans as a top EU priority in the next LGBTIQ Equality Strategy.



A systemic transformation

The LGBTIQ Equality Strategy promotes the systematic integration of gender identity across every major policy field, at the expense of sex, including:

- **Equality,**
where anti-discrimination frameworks are redefined to prioritise gender identity, and sex as a distinct legal category is eroded.
- **Education,**
where the inclusion of gender identity related themes is embedded in curricula, and self-ID policies are promoted within school environments.
- **Employment,**
where workplace training, diversity audits and funding mechanisms are tied to affirming internal policies and practices.
- **Healthcare,**
where “gender-affirming care” is promoted and sex-based language and services, particularly in reproductive health, are dismantled.
- **Justice,**
where hate speech and hate crime definitions are expanded to include gender identity and judicial staff are trained in these concepts.
- **Law enforcement,**
where personnel are trained on hate speech and hate crime (including monitoring, victim support and institutional liaison with transactivist groups) to shape operational protocols and response frameworks.
- **Sport,**
where self-ID is supported in sex-based competition categories.
- **Data collection,**
where sex categories are replaced by self-declared gender identities, including non-binary and other undefined classifications.



The result is a governance model in which material reality gives way to unsubstantiated assertions, adopted without impact assessments on other groups.

The LGBTIQ Equality Strategy is a blueprint for institutional transformation. Its effects ripple through every area it touches: redefining who qualifies as a woman, what constitutes discrimination and where the limits of lawful speech lie. The result is a governance model in which material reality gives way to unsubstantiated assertions, adopted without impact assessments on other groups.

EQUINET has increasingly aligned with gender identity advocacy, particularly through trans-focused initiatives, training programmes and publications, urging equality bodies to reinterpret gender equality law through a gender identity lens.

The role of equality bodies and their networks

The European Network of Equality Bodies ([EQUINET](#)) is a Brussels-based platform bringing together national equality bodies from across Europe, with members spanning all EU member states and several CoE countries. While co-funded by the European Commission, these bodies are independent in their operations, and the Commission cannot direct or control their work. EQUINET facilitates training, networking and coordinated positioning across member institutions.

For nearly 15 years, EQUINET has increasingly aligned with gender identity advocacy, particularly through trans-focused initiatives, training programmes and publications, urging equality bodies to reinterpret gender equality law through a gender identity lens. Much of this shift has come from building alliances with transactivist groups at the national level and with ILGA-Europe at the European level, rather than from top-down EU mandates.

In 2009 EQUINET had already conducted a survey to assess its members' work on trans issues. The following year, it published a report with recommendations for equality bodies to internalise trans issues into their mandates, make trans issues visible, engage actively with stakeholders, and pursue strategic casework to advance legal change. This line of action was reiterated a decade later in EQUINET's 2020 policy brief on [trans and intersex equality](#).

EQUINET also advised the EU to explicitly name trans people in the Equal Treatment Directives, promote gender identity within equality strategies and support trans advocacy efforts at member state level. [Since 2010](#), it has continued to convene high-level meetings and roundtables with representatives from the European Parliament, European Commission, FRA, EIGE, national equality bodies and transactivist NGOs to coordinate strategy and implementation.

With the adoption of [Council Directive \(EU\) 2024/1499](#) and [Directive \(EU\) 2024/1500](#), national equality bodies will have stronger mandates and must now apply EU sex discrimination law in a way that includes gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics. This is likely to expand EQUINET's influence on how anti-discrimination law is understood and enforced across member states. Much will depend on how these directives are implemented in practice.



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The hate speech framework



Early European efforts to combat hate speech date back to the mid-1990s, with the CoE's Committee of Ministers adopting [Recommendation R\(97\)20](#) on hate speech in 1997. These early frameworks focused primarily on addressing racism, antisemitism and xenophobia, reflecting the post-war European consensus on combating ethno-nationalist violence and discrimination. This was followed by considerable awareness-raising efforts, including the [No Hate Speech Movement](#) (2013), which targeted online hate and involved young people aged 13 and above across member states. At the same time, feminists campaigned to raise awareness of violence against women – including pornography, street harassment and femicide – highlighting sex as the motivating characteristic.

Yet, while sex has remained largely unrecognised as a factor in hate crimes, the campaign expanded the scope of hate speech efforts, in which intolerance against LGB individuals was collapsed with undefined notions of gender identity under the LGBT umbrella.

In 2015, the [No Hate Parliamentary Alliance](#) was set up, bringing together parliamentarians from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) and the European Parliament to tackle all forms of hate, including "LGBTI-phobia", through hearings, conferences and public awareness.

The issue gained sharper institutional focus in 2019, when the European Parliament passed a [resolution](#) condemning the establishment of "LGBTI-free zones" in Poland. It was the first time the Parliament addressed discrimination and hate speech targeting individuals they claimed fell under the LGBTI umbrella, calling for coordinated action at both the national and European levels.

In her 2020 State of the Union address, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen announced plans to expand the list of EU crimes under Article 83 TFEU to [include hate speech and hate crime](#), explicitly covering grounds such as "sexuality and gender". Separately, in 2021, the European Parliament adopted a resolution [\(2021/2035\(INL\)\)](#) calling for gender-based violence (GBV) to be added to the same list of so-called Euro-crimes, defining it to include violence on the basis of gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics. Both efforts reflect a broader trend: expanding EU criminal law under the banner of anti-discrimination and inclusion, while embedding contested categories at the highest level of legal protection. Though framed as measures to protect minorities, these proposals raise serious concerns about legal clarity, freedom of expression and the right to ideological non-conformity.

The push to elevate these categories into EU criminal law was echoed in the European Commission's [LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020–2025](#), which also calls for hate speech and hate crime based on gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics to be added to the list of EU crimes.

The notion of *anti-LGBTIQ hate* is conceptually fraught. It groups together diverse populations with conflicting rights and interests under a single, unexamined umbrella. The use of labels like *anti-queer*, *anti-LGBTIQ* or *LGBTIQ-phobia* obscures substantive conflicts within these categories. For example, lesbians who object to heterosexual males identifying as lesbians and accessing lesbian spaces are framed as perpetrators of hate, even when their objections are grounded in sex-based rights, their status as same-sex attracted women and a refusal to comply with legal fictions that intrude on their ability to associate, advocate, seek funding and organise around lesbian-specific rights and interests.

By collapsing these distinctions, EU discourse ignores the internal changes within what is presented as a single movement, an imagined community and assumed successor to the original LGB rights movement. It has grown into a vague mix of individuals and identities, lumping gender identity together with sexual orientation. Political disagreement is treated as hostility and open debate is shut down, leaving lesbians and gay men abandoned when they oppose the spread of gender identity ideology in their lives and across society.

It also imposes itself on women's rights advocates, journalists, educators, researchers and political actors who hold different views, denying them the space for dissent, fact-based reporting, evidence-informed teaching, scientific investigation, philosophical inquiry, feminist advocacy or even the basic duty of care.

The EU, the CoE and their institutions have, over time, integrated *SOGIESC* (sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics) into their anti-hate frameworks, across policy, reporting and programming. Current efforts to address this include the funding of an expanding portfolio of projects such as educational toolkits, police training manuals, the development of monitoring and reporting systems, and digital media campaigns.

This means that schools, universities, media outlets, public authorities, civil society, the police and the judiciary are regularly trained to operate within a narrow corridor of acceptable speech, where failing to acknowledge gender identity – either broadly or as an individual's self-declared innermost feeling of self – can trigger formal complaints, investigations, disciplinary action or public shaming. Criticism of the gender identity belief system is increasingly labelled as hate speech, even when the criticism is factual, evidence-based and respectful. What was once designed to prevent incitement, violence or harassment and protect vulnerable groups has become a mechanism for enforcing ideological conformity, deterring individuals and institutions from opting out, for fear of being labelled hateful and facing tangible consequences.

It has grown into a vague mix of individuals and identities, lumping gender identity together with sexual orientation.



Case law and judicial strategy

Case law refers to judicial decisions that interpret and apply law to specific situations. These rulings create precedent and can shape how future cases, and even legislation, are approached across jurisdictions. Strategic litigation has long been used by a wide range of interest groups, including women's rights advocates, conservatives and religious actors, to influence legal standards and public policy, from reproductive rights and equal pay to employment law and asylum. It has played a key role in the fight for LGB rights, including the decriminalisation of homosexuality, the legalisation of same-sex marriage, adoption rights and protection against employment discrimination.

Over the past decades, transactivists working with legal advocates have relied heavily on this approach and used the courts to create precedent in areas such as employment, legal sex recognition, data protection, freedom of movement and access to goods and services. The goal has been to embed gender identity norms into law through judicial interpretation, often bypassing public debate or legislative process, and to transfer these precedents into national contexts and ultimately establish them as new legal standards across Europe.

Europe's two highest courts, the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) and the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), have both issued [rulings](#) that progressively reframe sex-based protections through the lens of gender identity. CJEU decisions are binding on EU member states. National courts must apply them when interpreting EU law, and parliaments are required to align domestic legislation with the CJEU's decisions. ECtHR rulings, by contrast, are binding only on the country involved in the specific case under [Article 46](#) of the European Convention on Human Rights, but their broader legal reasoning is widely influential and frequently cited in national rulings and EU-level legal reasoning.

While their mandates differ, the two courts are closely intertwined: the CJEU often draws on ECtHR rulings, and once the EU formally accedes to the European Convention on Human Rights (a legal obligation set out in the Lisbon Treaty), ECtHR case law will become binding for the EU as a whole. This risks entrenching gender identity norms in EU case law, unless future jurisprudence reasserts the relevance of sex-based rights.

Notable European case law on gender identity includes the CJEU recognition of employment discrimination based on gender reassignment under the

EU Equal Treatment Directive (the case of [P v S and Cornwall County Council, Case C-13/94](#)), as well as a ruling requiring the recognition of legal sex changes from other EU member states for the purpose of exercising freedom of movement rights ([Mirin, Case C-4/23](#)). Meanwhile, the ECtHR has shaped the legal framework with decisions on legal recognition in official documents (Goodwin v. UK, 2002), prohibiting mandatory sterilisation or medicalised requirements for legal sex recognition (A.P., Garçon and Nicot v. France, 2017; Y.Y. v. Turkey, 2015), and repeatedly confirming gender identity as a protected ground under the European Convention on Human Rights. Complementing ECtHR case law, the recent [Deldits \(C-247/23\)](#) ruling held that, under EU data protection law, individuals have the right to request amendments to sex entries in official records, even without having undergone surgery or formal legal recognition procedures.

Through sustained legal activism, judicial rulings have become a vehicle for advancing gender identity norms across Europe and embedding gender identity doctrine into national law – without impact assessment, public debate or political accountability.

Exporting gender identity norms worldwide

Over the last decade, EU external action has become a powerful vehicle for mainstreaming gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics as protected categories – a legacy of the Yogyakarta Principles, which the EU embraced despite their non-binding nature and contradictions with EU law on sex based discrimination and equality between women and men.

The EU joined the [UN LGBTI Core Group](#) early on as an observer. The group is an influential coalition of states and NGOs promoting LGBTI rights at the intergovernmental level.

In 2013, the EU adopted its [LGBTI Guidelines for external relations](#), an extraordinarily detailed document instructing EU delegations to participate in Pride events, host LGBTI initiatives and incorporate LGBTI demands into diplomatic statements.

These guidelines complement other foreign policy instruments, including:

- the [EU Diversity & Inclusion Agenda](#) of the European External Action Service (EEAS), which promotes gender identity-based frameworks abroad
- and the [EU Gender Action Plan \(GAP\)](#).

While the GAP was originally designed to promote sex-based equality, it is now read in conjunction with the EU LGBTIQ Equality Strategy. This imports gender identity into development cooperation, blurring sex categories and undermining efforts to address sex-based inequality and violence.

The CoE has adopted similar approaches. In 2020, the [European Governmental LGBTI Focal Points Network](#), originally launched as an informal Dutch initiative, was formalised under the SOGI Unit. It now includes 38 member states, the EU, transactivist NGOs and international organisations such as the UN and the World Bank. Together, these actors coordinate legal and policy developments to advance gender identity norms.

The EU remains the world's largest development donor. Through global initiatives such as the [UN Spotlight Initiative](#), it had an opportunity to reaffirm the importance of sex as a legal category in line with EU law. Instead, it has exported legal confusion, promoting gender identity while eroding sex-based language and protections. In one [EU-funded project in India](#), 425 individuals, mostly men, obtained legal sex changes through self-declaration. In a country with one of the highest rates of sexual violence against women and where homophobia remains prevalent, such interventions risk serious harm. This is not an isolated case but part of a broader shift in which funding, diplomatic pressure, institutional networks and policy strategies are used to globalise gender identity norms under the banner of human rights.



Funding, diplomatic pressure, institutional networks and policy strategies are being used to globalise gender identity norms under the banner of human rights.

Moving ahead with clarity and courage



It brings together the networks, strategies and evidence this moment demands.

This report outlines the scale and scope of a transformation that is often denied, downplayed or misunderstood. The shift toward gender identity norms in European institutions has redefined foundational concepts of law, rights and democratic participation, often without clarity, consent or accountability.

Democratic processes are undermined. Human rights are redefined. Free speech is curtailed. Women's single-sex spaces disappear. The rights of lesbians and gay men are eroded. Children and adolescents are denied age-appropriate care and protection. Education is captured by ideology. Data on women's health and sex-based violence becomes unreliable. Fair competition in sport collapses. Healthcare is compromised. Core statistics are distorted.

We believe it is time to respond.

That is why we are launching Athena Forum: A European initiative for sex-based rights, democratic values and political courage.

It brings together the networks, strategies and evidence this moment demands.

It is a monumental undertaking – and we cannot do it alone.

Whether you are a policymaker, advocate, journalist, researcher, or concerned citizen – your support makes a difference. Speak up. Share this work. Use it in your networks, meetings and debates. Tell your representatives about the issues it raises.

- **Sex matters**

Insist on clear, sex-based language in law and policy. Demand that protections for sex-based rights of women and of lesbians and gay men be upheld. Don't accept the substitution with the idea of gender identity.

- **Safeguarding needs boundaries**

Insist on clear definitions that protect children, respect sex-based boundaries and maintain institutional coherence.

- **Democracy is for everyone**

Oppose backdoor policymaking. Demand public debate before anyone tries to rewrite the foundations of law, rights and protections.

- **Transparency exposes influence**

Call for transparency around funding flows to activist groups, informal influence networks and closed-door policy forums.

- **Disagreement is not hate**

Free speech includes the right to disagree. Demand narrow, precise definitions of hate speech that protect dignity without criminalising opinion. Use your voice.

Our values

- **Sex is real and immutable**

We recognise sex-based rights as foundational to legal and societal protections.

- **Bodily integrity for children and adolescents**

We affirm the right of minors to protection from premature or ideologically driven medical interventions.

- **Evidence-based policy**

We insist that public policy reflect material reality and be guided by robust evidence and accountability.

- **Free speech and open debate**

We defend the freedom to discuss complex issues, even when uncomfortable, controversial or contested.

- **Non-partisan and independent**

We are not affiliated with any political party or special interest group and welcome perspectives from across the political spectrum.

- **Respectful engagement**

We engage in good faith, discussing and challenging ideas – not individuals. Disagreement is not hate, and we reject all forms of abuse or discrimination.

- **Democratic values and universal human rights**

We believe that everyone, including people who identify as trans, has the right to live in dignity and without discrimination, and we support democratic governance grounded in pluralism and civic engagement.

Our team

Athena Forum was founded by Faika El-Nagashi, who serves as Director and leads the organisation together with a dedicated team.



Faika El-Nagashi

Faika El-Nagashi is a political scientist and former politician with long-standing experience in human rights and women's rights advocacy. As Founder and Director of Athena Forum, she focuses on defending sex-based rights and strengthening open and democratic debate in Europe.



Kurt Krickler

Kurt Krickler has been a pioneer of the lesbian and gay rights movement since 1979. He served as Chair of the Board of ILGA-Europe (1997–2003) and as a board member of the European Pride Organisers Association (2004–2010), and was active in HIV/AIDS advocacy from 1985 to 2002.



Marianne Driessen

Marianne Driessen is an education specialist from the Netherlands with a background in biology and language learning. A lifelong advocate for women's rights, she now writes on women's sport, lesbian visibility and gender care reform.



Paul Steger

Paul Steger is an economist and PhD researcher at the University of Mannheim, Germany. He focuses on the evidence gaps in law and medicine around sex and gender, bringing expertise in data analysis and empirical methods.



Elfriede Rometsch

Elfriede Rometsch is co-founder and Chair of EGGö (European Society for Sex Justice Austria). With a background in ecology, technology and analytics, and mediation, she advocates for recognising biological sex in law and for transparent public dialogue.

We are supported by a growing number of dedicated volunteers across Europe, whose time, talent and commitment make our work possible. We are deeply grateful for their contribution.

Advisory group

We are proud to work with a network with outstanding experience in advocacy, strategy and institutional engagement on sex-based rights. Their expertise strengthens our work and connects it to broader movements across Europe and beyond.



Maya Forstater

Maya Forstater is co-founder and CEO of Sex Matters, a UK human rights charity campaigning for clarity on sex in law and policy. She was the claimant in the landmark employment tribunal case that confirmed beliefs about sex are protected under the Equality Act 2010.



Stella O'Malley

Stella O'Malley is a psychotherapist, author and public speaker. She is the founder of Genspect and Beyond Trans, and has written numerous books on parenting, mental health and gender, drawing on two decades of experience working with young people and parents.



Anna Zobnina

Anna Zobnina is a policy advisor on women's rights, migration and violence against women. She has long experience working at the European level on gender equality, anti-discrimination and human rights, and contributes expertise to civil society and policy processes across Europe.



Frederick Schminke

Frederick Schminke is co-founder of Alliance LGB France and Chair of LGB International. An English teacher in Paris with degrees in history and education, he became active in LGB advocacy in response to the impact of gender identity ideology on young people.

Expert Network

We are building an [expert network](#) of professionals across law, policy, healthcare, academia, media and advocacy. They support our work through research, analysis, strategy and collaboration, helping us respond to complex institutional shifts with insight and clarity.

What comes next

Athena Forum is just getting started. In the coming months, we will:

- Launch our online platform and expand our expert network
- Bring people together for public debates across Europe
- Publish targeted briefings and commentary
- Support advocacy at the national and regional level

Join us in building a European initiative for sex-based rights, democratic values and political courage.

If you're able, please consider supporting us financially. To keep our work going, we need regular monthly donations that allow us to plan ahead and give stability to our projects.

You can donate via our website at athena-forum.eu/donate or make a bank transfer to:

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Join us in building a European initiative for sex-based rights, democratic values and political courage.



Athena Forum is a European think tank and strategic hub working to safeguard and advance sex-based rights across law, policy and civil society – and to confront their misrepresentation in public discourse.